

SQUABBLES ELEMENTS

Why People Are Mean & How To Stop Them

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www.SQUABBLES.com

Squabbles
Training Institute

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to my world of helping people solve their social problems. Trust me, it's a riot! I invite you to discover an innovative way to navigate the chaos using a system I developed and entitled: "SQUABBLES Elements: Why People Are Mean & How To Stop Them". You've taken the first step on a journey that promises not only to help you understand why people behave the way they do, but also how to effectively navigate social dramas and conflicts that often seem overwhelming.

This system is inspired by the periodic table of elements, a marvel of science that has made the complex world of chemistry understandable and accessible. Just as the periodic table allows us to make sense of the building blocks of our physical world, the SQUABBLES Elements system aids in unraveling the mysteries of human behavior and interaction.

We often find ourselves in situations where we're left scratching our heads, wondering why people act the way they do. Why are people mean? What prompts someone to create conflict or behave in ways that make others uncomfortable? As you delve into the SQUABBLES Elements, you will find answers to these questions, enabling you to comprehend the intricacies of human behavior and the motivations behind actions that seem inexplicable.

However, this book is not merely about understanding why people are mean, it's also about empowering you with the tools to diffuse situations that involve unpleasant or harmful behavior. Each chapter is filled with strategies and techniques drawn from psychology, sociology, and conflict resolution, providing a comprehensive toolkit to navigate through social dramas and arrive at peaceful resolutions.

While we cannot always control the behavior of others, we can equip ourselves with the wisdom and understanding to respond effectively and graciously. We can learn to navigate the turbulent waters of conflict with grace and strength, turning confrontation into constructive dialogue and disharmony into peace.

"SQUABBLES Elements" is your guide on this journey, a beacon of hope in an often confusing social landscape. Whether you're dealing with a "bully", a difficult neighbor, or family disagreements, the SQUABBLES Elements are here to assist you. The hope this book offers is not just the cessation of conflict, but the wisdom to turn these seemingly negative experiences into opportunities for personal growth and deeper understanding of the human condition. You will soon find out that my ultimate goal for you is to cure you of your natural tendency to be offended, and I do this by building up your emotional resilience. I'm convinced that emotional resilience is the remedy to most conflicts in the world.

So, take a deep breath, and step forward with confidence. You're about to unravel the mysteries of human behavior, gain powerful

tools to resolve conflicts, and discover your own potential to bring about positive change. The journey may not always be easy, but the rewards will be immeasurable.

It's time to introduce you to my SQUABBLES Elements. Let's begin this journey together, towards understanding, resolution, and ultimately, the peace you are desperately looking for.

SQUABBLES ELEMENTS





EMOTIONAL RESILIENCE

The Secret To Resolving Social Problems

One of the most resilient individuals I ever knew was my grandmother, Grandma Jodie. As with many grandmothers, she was elderly. When I delved into her life story, I was struck by its remarkable trajectory. She had my father and uncle, twins, and in the aftermath suffered greatly from postpartum depression. It was so severe that she needed to be hospitalized. It was a challenging time, threatening to tear her family apart. My grandfather, a hard-working businessman, didn't have the capacity to care for the family while she was in recovery. But Grandma Jodie summoned an inner strength to claw her way

back to motherhood, and upon her return, she was an exemplary mother.

I've heard tales of my grandfather's struggles to keep his business, Gibbs Clothing Company, afloat amidst growing competition from large department stores. The company, which my great grandfather started in Topeka, KS, ran five men's clothing stores across the heartland. The economic hardships led Grandma Jodie to step into roles they couldn't afford to hire for. At one point, while operating the cash register, she was robbed and assaulted at gunpoint, knocked unconscious by the butt of the gun. This event didn't just leave her with post-traumatic stress disorder, but also, in retrospect, an experience of post-traumatic growth. She had an exceptional ability to appreciate life in its entirety, even the struggles. She was the wisest person I knew and shared wisdom that, I believe, saved my life.

At the tender age of 14, I was grappling with major social problems. I had such a terrible time in the 6th grade that I had to transfer to another school. Unfortunately, the 7th grade was even more challenging, and I begged my parents to move me to another school again. I started 8th grade with struggles, and I was engaged in non-suicidal self-injury, a term used clinically for behaviors like cutting. The scars from that period still show today on my wrist, a daily reminder of my past pain and the reasons behind my mission to help those facing similar despair. If you're trained in understanding non-suicidal self-injury, you'll know it's about control. The internal emotional turmoil becomes too much to handle, so one inflicts physical pain upon oneself for some semblance of control.

The situation had become so severe that my mother was terrified I might attempt suicide. And it was in this dark period of my life that Grandma Jodie paid me a visit. I remember her asking, "Sonny, why are you so sad?" When I told her about the mean kids at school, she had a different perspective. She claimed that they couldn't hurt my feelings or make me angry – that I was doing that

to myself. When I objected, she challenged me with an analogy, asking me if physical pain, like being hit with a stick, could be prevented by thoughts. The answer was clearly no. But then she proposed that emotional pain, caused by hurtful words, could indeed be shielded by my thoughts. Her wisdom boiled down to this: she had decided long ago that no one could hurt her feelings without her consent. "If you want to break my heart," she said poetically, "you have to go through my brain first."

I think this was her attempt to delineate the difference between physical pain and emotional pain. She seemed to be trying to instill in me the understanding that while physical pain is typically beyond our control, emotional pain can be managed and mitigated through our thoughts. This perspective made me realize the critical difference between the two. Physical pain is usually out of our control, but our thoughts have a 100% ability to protect us from emotional pain. That was the pivotal lesson Grandma Jodie gave me: to differentiate between physical pain and emotional pain, and not to conflate the two. I think she encapsulated that wisdom in her saying, "If you want to break my heart, you have to go through my brain first."

Today's generation needs to learn this.

Today, we're part of a society that views words as weapons, words that are capable of harm, injury, even death. We've spent the past couple of decades teaching our children that words can wound, that they can kill. Consequently, when harsh words are directed towards us, we immediately think, "You're causing me pain. You're inflicting a wound. You're killing me." But words only hold the power we attribute to them. Therefore, I firmly believe that building resilience begins with recognizing the control we have in shielding our emotional state, and I'll tell you, we have a lot of control.

An ancient proverb by Solomon advises, "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it." How do you

guard your heart, you might ask? Here, Dr. Albert Ellis's Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy provides a convincing framework. Ellis observed that adversity (A) + belief system (B) equals emotional consequence (C). This ABC theory is fascinating.

When someone comes up to you and says, "I don't like you," that's adversity (A). And instantaneously, an emotional consequence (C) arises, which may cause you to say something like, "That hurt my feelings!" Due to the swift succession of A and C, we're tricked into thinking that the person's comment directly caused our feelings of hurt. However, nestled between A and C is B, our "belief system". It's what you think about the incident, your belief system, that ultimately determines your emotional reaction. It's a groundbreaking concept that should be widely understood and taught, especially to our children. Our emotions don't operate independently; they're guided by our beliefs. They have a director, and that director is our thoughts, and where our thoughts lead, our feelings follow.

According to Ellis, effective therapy doesn't primarily focus on the adversity (A) or the emotional consequence (C) but rather on the belief system (B). As counselors for ourselves and others, we need to challenge our beliefs: Is it true? Is there evidence for that? Why do you think that way? Are there any distortions? This focus on the belief system is crucial because it's the root cause of your emotional reactions, and, consequently, altering it can be your cure. However, this approach is often misunderstood and mislabeled as victim-blaming in today's society, making it the most significant challenge I face in my work. When I instruct people to take personal responsibility for how they feel by changing what they think about what happened to them, I get blamed for blaming victims for their problems. I am not blaming victims. I am, however, teaching people why they feel bad and giving them strategies to stop feeling bad. I empower people to make changes by showing them how they are contributing to their needless suffering.

When I was younger, my grandmother introduced me to a simplified version of this concept, and it was my salvation from despair. I realized I had control over my emotional distress. Being called a name or excluded from a group didn't have to ruin my day. Instead, I could find another path and maintain my positivity. Understanding that I could train my mind to find the silver lining in every setback, to see the good in the bad, was liberating. Resilience could be a learned skill. I could use adversity as a tool for my own psychological growth.

Two Types of Belief Systems

There are essentially two types of belief systems. On one hand, there are rigid and demanding beliefs, and on the other, flexible and indifferent ones. Let's consider a situation: someone tells you, "I don't like you." A person with rigid beliefs will react defensively, taking it personally, insisting that the other person should be respectful and kind. However, a person with flexible beliefs will take it in stride, unaffected by the harsh words. As a result, the person with flexible beliefs remains happy, peaceful, joyful because their emotional state isn't controlled by the actions of others.

Unfortunately, we've conditioned our youth to harbor rigid belief systems. Anti-bullying initiatives have taught them that no one has the right to be unkind to them, and they're incapable of handling their social problems independently. They're led to believe that they're victims. And then, social media platforms amplify their insecurities, fueling their obsession with perfectionism and approval. These high, often irrational, demands on themselves and others collide with the harsh reality of life, leading to despair.

However, there's another way. We need to teach our children that life includes suffering, and resilience can be learned. Resilient individuals, despite their suffering, often wouldn't change a thing about their past, as it shaped them into who they are.

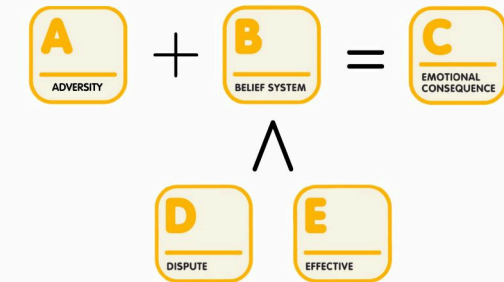
I encourage my audiences to never again say, "You made me angry" or "You hurt my feelings." There is no such thing as a button to trigger your anger or distress. No one has direct access to your emotional state without passing through the gateway of your belief system, your thoughts. Your emotional response is determined by how you perceive what happens to you. Believe it or not, it's entirely possible to feel grateful for the adversities you encounter. This is why I believe that "emotional resilience" is the secret to resolving social problems.

Drawing inspiration from Albert Ellis's ABC Theory of Emotions, I created a framework that I call "SQUABBLES Elements for Conflict Resolution." I will be elaborating on this concept throughout this book. At first glance, the Squabble Elements may seem a bit complex, but I assure you, they'll become familiar as we go along.

My muse for this idea was the periodic table of elements, an ingenious representation that encapsulates the atomic value of all matter in a single snapshot. It made me wonder if we could achieve something similar for adversities. Could we create a 'table' that would illustrate what happened, how it made us feel, why it affected us based on our belief system, and possibly a different way to feel by challenging those beliefs, thereby coming up with a more effective response to the unwanted event?

Primarily, because of my education in social psychology, this framework revolves around social aggressions. But I want to assure you, the resilience skills you develop for dealing with difficult people can just as effectively be applied to difficult circumstances. Whether it's an adversary or an adverse situation, the same psychological tools apply.

I've dedicated my life to helping people coexist harmoniously, and I believe the SQUABBLES Elements are a wonderful framework for learning these skills. Get to know every element and you will see a dramatic growth in your social and emotional wellbeing.



INTERVENTION

The A-B-C-D-E Building Blocks of the SQUABBLES Elements

The entire structure of my element rubric is grounded on Albert Ellis's ABC theory of emotions. 'A' denotes an adversity - something that occurs and almost instantaneously triggers 'C', an emotional consequence such as anger or sadness. However, what is intriguing, as Ellis underscored and all in the CBT field concur, is that it's not 'A' that causes 'C', but 'B' - our belief system. So before 'C' manifests, 'A' has to pass through 'B'. It's not the external party that hurts me, rather, it's I who disturb myself by my rigid insistence that they must not behave a certain way.

The same applies to circumstances. For instance, during a divorce, the degree of disturbance experienced correlates to the rigid demand that this divorce must not happen. The stiffer and more demanding you are, the more upset you will become. This is why mental health involves the capacity to adapt well to harsh realities. Acceptance is key, even when it's not what you wanted or hoped for.

Dr. Albert Ellis made a fascinating point by stating that unconditional acceptance - of oneself, others, and life - is the end goal of therapy. In a sense, it's the therapy equivalent of a finish line. There's a hymn that encapsulates this sentiment - "It is well with my soul". However, this isn't merely acceptance, it's something more. It's resilience. My personal definition of resilience is: leveraging adversity for psychological growth, not merely recovering, but advancing forward.

To give a simplified example, imagine you're bouncing on a trampoline and your annoying younger brother intrudes. (By the way, he is only annoying if you are annoying) You can protest his presence, or you can accept this unfortunate reality and make the most of it - like getting a double bounce from his extra weight. That's the essence of resilience.

This resilience, this capacity to accept adversity and use it for growth, is a learnable skill. Of course, some individuals naturally have a more resilient disposition, but everyone can learn. Those who struggle most with resilience, as evidenced in the Big 5 personality test, are those who score high on neuroticism. These individuals tend to have a strong need for order and a tendency towards emotional volatility, both of which can impede resilience.

On a personal note, I tried to raise my children to have high frustration tolerance, a key component of resilience. I would intentionally expose them to minor irritations and challenges to raise their tolerance and lower their demands for how life should be. I believe that by lowering our expectations of how things must

be and raising our tolerance for frustration, creates a resilience margin. The wonderful news is that we can intentionally grow our margin for resilience. We have the capacity to endure more than we think and are stronger than we may believe. The SQUABBLES Elements is built on Ellis' full A-B-C-D-E theory which I will now describe in greater detail.

Emotions, both positive and negative, significantly affect our daily lives. They guide our decisions, shape our interactions, and influence our overall mental well-being. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of our emotions and how to manage them is pivotal to living a healthier, more fulfilling life. Dr. Ellis, the pioneer of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), devised this model to offer a clear and easy-to-understand approach for interpreting and managing our emotional responses.

A-B-C-D-E Model Overview

The A-B-C-D-E model stands for Activating Event (or Adversity/Aggression), Beliefs, Emotional Consequences, Disputing Beliefs, and finding a more Effect Response, respectively. Each letter represents a different stage in the emotional response process, highlighting how our beliefs about an event, not the event itself, significantly impact our emotional reactions. Here's how each component works:

A: Activating Event (or Adversity/Aggression)

The model begins with an 'Activating Event', which refers to the objective situation or event that triggers an emotional response. These could be everyday occurrences or significant life events, like receiving criticism at work or experiencing a relationship breakup.

B: Beliefs

The 'Beliefs' phase refers to the interpretation or thoughts we form about the activating event. These beliefs are often shaped by our personal experiences, culture, upbringing, and other factors.

According to Dr. Ellis, it's not the activating event itself but our beliefs about it that influence our emotional response.

C: Consequences

The 'Consequences' phase is the emotional and behavioral response resulting from our beliefs about the activating event. If our beliefs are rational, the consequences will typically be positive or healthy emotions. However, irrational beliefs can lead to unhealthy emotional responses like excessive worry, anger, or sadness.

D: Disputing

'Disputing' refers to the process of challenging and questioning our irrational beliefs. This involves assessing the evidence for our beliefs, considering alternative perspectives, and evaluating the usefulness of maintaining these beliefs. The goal is to replace irrational beliefs with rational ones.

E: Effect

Finally, the 'Effect' phase involves the new feelings and behaviors that emerge after disputing and changing our irrational beliefs. If the disputing process is successful, it results in healthier emotional responses and more constructive behavior. I call this "a more effective response".

Dr. Ellis's A-B-C-D-E model offers a structured approach to understanding how our beliefs shape our emotions and behavior. It asserts that by recognizing and challenging our irrational beliefs, we can alter our emotional responses to events, leading to healthier emotional lives.

To put it in simpler terms, Ellis's theory teaches us that our perception, or how we view an event, greatly influences how we feel and respond to it. It's not the event itself but our beliefs about the event that truly govern our emotions. Thus, if we can learn to change our thinking or beliefs, we can change our emotional

responses and, in turn, our lives.

It's important to note that this model isn't intended to eliminate negative emotions entirely – after all, these emotions are a natural part of life. Instead, its goal is to help individuals manage their emotions better, particularly those that might be unnecessarily intense or prolonged, due to irrational beliefs.

Dr. Albert Ellis's A-B-C-D-E theory of emotion is a practical tool for emotion management. It empowers us to understand and reshape our emotional world by highlighting the pivotal role our beliefs play in shaping our emotional responses. As such, it provides a roadmap to a healthier and more balanced emotional life. Thus, the entire SQUABBLES Elements is built on the brilliant framework he provided.

The Value Of Social Problems

I firmly believe that social difficulties present an invaluable opportunity to cultivate emotional resilience. Social problems, which are common and inevitable, serve two key purposes: first, they reveal our vulnerabilities and weaknesses; second, they offer us a chance to practice and hone our resilience.

I recall a time when my son, Jackson, was just nine years old and about to attend summer camp. When asked why he was excited, he said he was eager to meet bullies. This was a proud moment for me as a parent. When I asked him why he wanted to encounter bullies, he replied, "I want to practice my skills," referring to the resilience techniques I'd been teaching him.

To encourage this resilience, I offered him a reward system. For every time someone was mean to him and he managed to stay calm, he would earn a dollar. If he responded to their meanness with kindness and managed to make them nicer, he would earn five dollars. However, he wasn't allowed to provoke them intentionally. That week, he earned 43 dollars, a testament to his growing resilience.

While this is a good mindset to develop, I do want to clarify that there are times when we should be firm and unwavering. For instance, we should be rigid when it comes to preventing harm to our physical selves or property. There should be strict boundaries against assault, vandalism, theft, and abuse.

However, most of our challenges aren't these severe scenarios but rather instances causing subjective harm, harm which is contingent on our perspective. Thus, our reactions to these situations are within our control. It's crucial to teach individuals when they should feel upset and it should be rare. Most of our distress stems from rigid expectations and demands that aren't met.

When clients approach me with issues, I often explain to them that their true enemy isn't the person causing trouble but their propensity to take offense. Imagine how much easier life would be if we didn't get offended easily. This offended ability stems from rigid demands or unfulfilled desires. Desires can easily morph into demands and vice versa.

Disappointment is the outcome when a desire is not met, while distress results from unfulfilled demands. Hence, the real issue often isn't the person causing trouble but rather our perception of the situation. This is why understanding and managing our belief system is crucial. As the Bible says in the book of James: *"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war..."* James 4:1-4



AGGRESSION

Elements A1 - A4

The SQUABBLES Elements, built on the Ellis' A-B-C-D-E therapeutic intervention model, provides a framework to analyze a "squabble". A squabble is a noisy or petty argument that has the potential to get out of hand. If we can manage the problem on the SQUABBLE level, we will be able to avoid catastrophic consequences.

When someone comes to me for help with a "people problem", the first question I like to ask is: "What Happened?" I need to identify the specific aggression that they are complaining about as illustrated in A1 - A4 of the SQUABBLES Elements.

- A1: Did they say something to you? (Verbal Direct Aggression)

- A2: Did they do something to you? (Nonverbal Direct Aggression)
- A3: Did they say something about you? (Verbal Indirect Aggression)
- A4: Did they do something without you? (Nonverbal Indirect (Passive) Aggression)

I always encourage individuals who feel “bullied” to refrain from the use of the word “bully” and be more specific about what happened. I want to keep the aggressions in their proper size, and ultimately view them as opportunities to grow stronger socially and emotionally. Suppose you report to a police officer, "I've been abused." The officer would undoubtedly ask, "What happened?" The term 'bullying' is rather ambiguous and counterproductive; it's a loaded judgment. Thus, I prefer asking for specifics. As Fred Rogers wisely stated, "If it's mentionable, it's manageable."

When you express to a parent, "I've been bullied," they may envision the worst and confront the school superintendent demanding action. Such a common complaint suggests inaction on the part of educators. However, it's crucial to stand behind our educators because anti-bullying laws don't simply erase aggression.

All these laws do is place the onus on schools to eliminate aggression. I often ask parents, "Have you figured out how to eliminate sibling rivalry amongst your three children?" It seems quite hypocritical to have no suggestions for educators, just high expectations, rigid demands, and grievances.

By asking 'what happened?', we can uncover if the person in question spoke to you directly or about you, acted towards you directly, or did something excluding you.

- A1 aggressions could be lying, criticizing, or insulting.
- A2 aggressions could be pushing, shoving, or rudely gesturing.
- A3 aggressions could be gossiping, rumoring, or online

trolling.

- A4 aggressions could be excluding, avoiding, or ignoring.

These offenses can be quite harmful, and therefore it is super important that we know where we (or our loved ones) are most vulnerable. It doesn't help that today's society has conditioned us to take offense to these types of aggressions thereby adopting a victim mentality. No respectable branch of psychology supports today's culture of victimhood. I often see young people with an “intersectional” victim mindset where they stack up their 'victim' characteristics believing it gives them moral superiority and magnifies their voice in society. However, no serious school of psychology or philosophy would ever approve of such a mindset.

Psychology aims to help you overcome *chronic* victimization. Our objective as therapists is to help you reframe difficult experiences in a way that benefits you. When a child says, "I've been bullied," my first question is, "What exactly happened?" Our response and how we handle the situation (as the helper) is crucial. Like a two year old who stumbles in the hallway and looks at his mom's face to see how hurt he might be, so too people are looking at our reaction to their stories of victimization. I may show signs of sympathy on my face, but I will never show a sign of devastation to someone going through a hardship. My disturbance doesn't help them.

A helpful tool to evaluate where one might be emotionally weak is my Socio-Emotional Resiliency Scale or 'Resilience Test'. It is primarily designed for young individuals, helping them identify their vulnerabilities. The test reveals that younger individuals, generally up to sixth grade, are more sensitive towards direct aggression (A1, A2), while older individuals are affected more by indirect aggression (A3, A4). (Download at SQUABBLES.com)

The test demonstrates that every individual is resilient, but our resilience varies in different areas. Using assessments like the 'Resilience Test' can help you understand your weak points and

work towards improving them.

Once we are able to identify the areas of aggression that we might be vulnerable to, we need to challenge and reframe our beliefs about those behaviors which will ultimately change our reactions to them. For example, some men respond to verbal provocations with physical reactions, which could lead to unfortunate incidents. It's essential to learn to manage our reactions to provocations and understand that we don't have to escalate hostilities. In fact, we can quite easily de-escalate them when we change our thinking about them. Most people who have learned to be resilient will agree that the worst situations can turn out to be beneficial if we change our beliefs about them.

I'm reminded of a scenario where a prominent pastor in my town came to me for counsel. He particularly struggled with non-verbal direct aggressions (A2). He couldn't stand it when men on his organizational board would fold their arms in protest, roll their eyes in disgust, or intentionally make disapproving facial expressions. I asked him what was the ultimate form of this type of aggression that he couldn't seem to tolerate, and he told me that he feels enraged if someone shows him their middle finger, flicking him off. He was resilient to verbal insults (A1), but nonverbal insults (A2) drove him mad. To help him overcome this, I used the technique of exposure response prevention therapy, in which I exposed him to the gesture repeatedly until it lost its power over him. Flicking off a pastor takes guts, but I did it out of love for him and it worked! He was able to totally rid himself of his initial reaction of offense after I helped him rethink the offense and then exposed him repeatedly to my middle finger. This is a highly effective way of building resilience. When we lower the importance of an offense and at the same time, raise our frustration tolerance by exposing ourselves repeatedly to it, it loses its psychological power over us. Our resilience margin expands.

However, while promoting resilience, we should also be aware

of the cultural implications and sensitivities surrounding certain words or actions. For example, a racial slur can deeply affect someone if they've grown up in an environment that rigidly believes no one has the right to use that word against them. The "N" word is a perfect example of this. Many people enrage themselves after being called such a derogatory slur. While I can certainly be sympathetic, I must say that they are emotionally weak, and not resilient in this area (A1). This rigid belief system can leave them vulnerable and easily provoked. The solution for the "N" word can be found in just about every explicit rap song. The rap community at large has neutralized the power of that word by overusing it as a term of affection towards their friends. Brilliant!

What about A4 exclusions? Can a person learn to be emotionally resilient towards being left out of a group? Yes! It's essential to teach children and individuals to be selective about their relationships and to understand that not being included in every group or event is not a negative thing. Exclusion is a good thing. It preserves resources and values. It allows us the freedom to choose who we want to be around. It's a fundamental right within the boundaries of liberty. Making people include others is not only inhumane, it is profoundly destructive. I teach my kids to be friendly to everyone, but don't be friends with everyone. Bad company corrupts good morals.

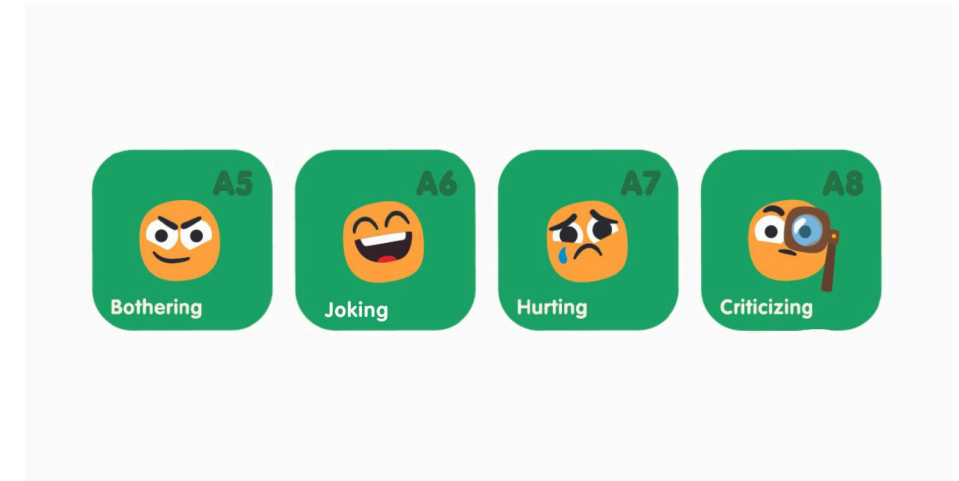
Beliefs that are rigid around these four categories of aggression (verbal insults (A1), physical provocations (A2), gossip (A3), and exclusion (A4)) often lead to social conflicts. Flexibility and adaptability in these four areas are key in fostering resilience and avoiding people's problems. For years, I have been teaching people how to appreciate all four categories of aggression.

- Verbal insults keep us humble and might help us improve if we are willing to listen.
- Physical provocation tests our resilience and gives us an opportunity to turn the other cheek.

- Gossip and rumors prove that we matter in the lives of others and improve our popularity for better or worse.
- Exclusions make it clear who our true friends are and keep us from environments where we are not wanted.

When you really start to evaluate your weaknesses and target growth in the areas of vulnerability, you can finally grow in resilience. You start to hope for negative experiences, like people cutting you off in traffic, and approach them with flexibility instead of rigidity. When you hit the road expecting to see idiots, you are elated when you do. Instead of negative feelings, you start to have good feelings. Like a boxer needs a good sparring partner in his life to get better, you too need jerks in your life to improve your resilience skills.

Exposure response prevention therapy can be an effective method in achieving this flexibility, by repeatedly exposing yourself to the trigger until it loses its power over you. Ultimately, cultivating resilience comes down to being flexible, adaptable, and accepting in the face of adversity.



MOTIVATION

Elements A5 - A8

As I mentioned earlier, when someone comes to me for help with a social problem, my first task is to ask “what happened?” I want to find out specifically what someone did to them. Whatever their complaint, it is likely that this is also an area of vulnerability for them.

My second question is simply: “why do you think they did that?” This question is somewhat of a shocker. The individual complaining was not thinking about the other person’s motivation behind the aggression so much as they were thinking about the level of offense they felt about the aggression they just endured. This is the problem with being offended, it blinds us from the ability to see the *why* behind the *what*.

Offenses narrowly focus on the *what*: “They called me a name! (A1) They flicked me off! (A2) They are talking bad about me behind my back! (A3) They didn’t invite me to the party! (A4)”

I don’t care so much about *what* happened. I want to know *why* it happened. According to my SQUABBLES Elements, there are only four motivations behind aggressions:

- A5 - Bothering (They want to upset you)
- A6 - Joking (They want to laugh at your expense)
- A7 - Hurting (They feel wronged by you and are retaliating)
- A8 - Criticizing (They see a flaw and desire to point it out)

I first learned about the different motivations behind aggressive behavior from School Psychologist Izzy Kalman. His theories of aggression are heavily influenced by his work as a school psychologist and a school consultant. His approach, broadly known as the “Bullies to Buddies” system, centers on the idea that people must learn to solve their problems with people without anyone else’s help. This led him to consider how to teach kids how to respond to their aggressors, but before that was possible, they would need to figure out WHY the person was being mean.

Izzy primarily focused on the Bothering (A5) aspect of aggression - something he called Dominance Behavior. Most of his writing is of this type, considering that most “bullying” complaints are really complaints of people trying to provoke other people. However he also has written a bit about humor, the victim mindset, and the importance of taking criticisms.

When I decided to put together the SQUABBLES Elements, I knew I would need to include the four motivations of aggression. These are things Izzy introduced to me, and they have served me well my entire career.

A5 - Bothering Motivation

Izzy Kalman asserts that dominance behavior is a fundamental

aspect of human and animal nature, encoded in our biological programming. He suggests that this innate drive for dominance surfaces across all social realms, including familial relationships, workplaces, political arenas, and religious institutions. According to Kalman, the pursuit of wealth is another manifestation of this need for dominance because accumulating wealth increases one’s ability to control and influence others. He contends that this drive is often subconscious, only becoming apparent when one’s dominance is threatened.

Kalman suggests that we are biologically programmed to strive for power, echoing principles seen in the wild where the strongest survive and the weakest perish. This instinct remains relevant in modern civilized societies, where we continually seek power and dominance over one another.

Kalman’s assertion about the instinctual nature of dominance behavior is supported by various psychological and sociological theories, as well as by studies from the field of evolutionary psychology and observations in the animal kingdom. It’s clear that the drive for dominance and power plays a significant role in human behavior and social interactions. But why?

The desire for power over others can be traced back to both evolutionary and social factors.

1. Leadership:

From an evolutionary or primitive perspective, individuals who were successful in acquiring power in the form of resources, leadership, or status often had higher chances of survival and reproductive success. Power could mean access to better food, protection from threats, and a wider choice of mates. Such power dynamics can be observed in many animal species, including primates, where dominant individuals tend to have more control over resources.

2. Control:

From a psychological perspective, power is often associated with feelings of control, security, and autonomy. When people have power, they have a sense of control over their environment and their future, which can lead to increased self-confidence and reduced anxiety. Power can also give individuals the freedom to act according to their desires without being overly constrained by others.

3. Status:

On a sociocultural level, power can be equated with respect and social status. Societies often reward powerful individuals with recognition and prestige, which can lead to a positive self-image and societal approval.

4. Fear:

However, the desire for power can also stem from less positive motivations such as fear, insecurity, or a desire to control and dominate others. Some individuals may seek power as a way to compensate for perceived weaknesses, to prevent perceived threats, or to exert their will over others.

It's important to note that the desire for power is not inherently bad. It becomes problematic when it leads to harmful behavior, such as manipulation, coercion, or abuse. Many effective leaders, innovators, and change-makers are driven by a healthy desire for power, using it to create positive change and to promote the wellbeing of others.

The key is to balance the pursuit of power with ethical considerations, empathy, and a commitment to the collective good. This is often referred to as "power with" rather than "power over" others, promoting cooperation and mutual growth.

Let's imagine a typical scenario of sibling rivalry. The older brother tells the younger, "I don't like you!" The younger one

protests, "Be quiet!" The older replies "never!". The younger one says "You're hurting my feelings!" The older one laughs: "That's the point stupid."

The motivation behind the older siblings' aggression is to bother the younger brother. To assert control over them. The older wants power over the younger. The power to hurt their feelings, the power to make them angry, the power to upset them. When someone is intentionally bothering another person, they are wanting a negative reaction, and when they get it, they also get satisfaction. This is why the same mean person does the same mean thing again and again and again - day in and day out. When we give others power over us (power to upset us), they are not likely to want to give that power back, and are even more likely to use that power repeatedly over time to maintain dominance. And that is what sociologists call this particular motivation: dominance behavior. You see it in the animal kingdom, and you see it within human relationships. Dominance behavior (a.k.a. A5 Bothering) is the foundation of sibling rivalry, and often in your household, you'll find one individual who enjoys bothering and another who is easily bothered, leading to a toxic home environment.

So how do we solve this problem? How do we get A5 aggressors to stop trying to bother us? It's not advisable to confront this situation directly by moralistically instructing the provocateur, saying, "Aren't you supposed to follow the golden rule? What's wrong with you? Stop being mean!" You can't effectively moralize with someone who enjoys bothering another. The reason is that they often don't see another way to dominate. Bothering is the easiest way to wield power over another. They lack the creativity to dominate in other ways. They need someone to explain how to gain influence over another through competency and service rather than a carrot (incentives) and stick (threats). While promoting the golden rule is crucial, it isn't effective to make a person moral.

I'd suggest a subtler approach for the child who's susceptible to irritation by fortifying their emotional resilience. Teach the golden rule to the target of aggression. After all, that was why the Golden Rule was invented. It was an instruction for those who didn't like the way they were being treated. The Golden Rule informs the target of aggression to respond differently to their aggressor. This throws them off their game! Kalman uses a concept of 'winning' and 'losing' which has helped countless kids learn to avoid being dominated or bothered by provocateurs. For example of sibling rivalry, a parent could ask the targeted child: "When your brother is mean to you, and you become angry, how do you feel? Do you feel like a winner or a loser?" When they admit to feeling like a loser, you can ask them, "And how do you think your brother feels, like a winner or loser?" They will obviously say "winner." Follow up with, "Do you want to continue losing every time they are mean to you?" The child will say "no" and likely understand right away. If the motivation behind the aggression is to bother them, then being bothered is the dumbest thing they can do. Being unfazed is the smartest thing they can do. Don't get upset and respond to them like a friend. Or as grandma put it, "kill them with kindness."

Getting upset is precisely why the aggression continues. This is analogous to a foolish dog chasing its tail. Every time your child is provoked, they respond with anger. Like our silly dog chasing its tail without understanding, they keep lashing out. The only way to stop the cycle is to stop reacting with anger, and then the individual will stop being cruel. It may take a week, and might even get a little worse before it gets better. But be strong, stay unfazed and the aggressor will feel like a loser, look like a loser, and eventually give up.

There's a children's book by Bill Cosby titled 'The Meanest Thing to Say,' teaching kids to respond with "So?" This simple response can potentially defuse the situation by showing that the attempt to provoke you was unsuccessful.

A6 - Joking Motivation

Many people misinterpret someone's humor as an act of aggression. They ignorantly believe the comedian is being violent, when in reality they are not. It's astounding to me how many social problems happen on school campuses as a direct result of someone not being able to take a joke about themselves. Which is why it's important to teach people how humor works.

The Benign Violation Theory (BVT) of humor is a widely accepted explanation for why and how things are funny. This theory was developed by Peter McGraw and Caleb Warren. According to this theory, humor occurs when and only when three conditions are satisfied:

1. There is a violation (out of the norm)
2. The violation is perceived to be benign (harmless)
3. Both these perceptions occur simultaneously

A "violation" refers to something that threatens the way you believe the world "ought" to be. It can break a norm, whether it's a social norm, moral norm, or even a physical law.

However, for humor to arise, this violation can't be just any violation—it needs to be benign. That is, the violation must seem safe, acceptable, or non-threatening in some way. It should not actually pose a significant threat to our sense of how things "should" be. There are various ways that a violation can be seen as benign. For instance, the violation might occur in a context that clearly signals it's not real, the individual might be psychologically distant from the violation, or the individual might not commit strongly to the violated norm.

Jokes often involve a violation of some kind of social norm or expectation, and making someone the "butt" of a joke is an easy way to create this kind of violation. For instance, a joke might play off a stereotype or a person's known character traits, or it might involve a person being placed in an unusual or unexpected

situation.

In all these cases, the humor arises from the violation of our expectations or norms. But for the joke to be funny rather than mean or offensive, this violation needs to be seen as benign (harmless). That's where the dynamics of the situation and the relationships between the people involved come into play. If the person at the butt of the joke is not truly harmed, if the violation of their dignity is temporary and reversible, and if it's understood by all involved that the joke is just a joke, then the violation can be seen as benign, and the joke can be funny.

However, it's important to remember that humor is highly subjective, and what one person finds benign, another person might find offensive. The boundaries between benign violations and harmful ones can be blurry and vary from person to person, group to group, and culture to culture. This is why humor—especially humor that involves making someone the butt of a joke—needs to be navigated with sensitivity.

When people come to me offended because they were the subject of humor, my remedy for them is to expand their resilience margin. They need to lower the importance of the offense and raise their frustration tolerance. I do this by helping them rethink their rigid demands and then expose them to similar types of humor. This will eventually help them be able to take (and even make) a joke about themselves. I might show them a celebrity roast video where someone is taking the worst type of insults from other people, having their flaws exaggerated for the sake of a punchline. I point out how much admiration everyone has for the target of the jokes. Why do we admire people who are being made fun of? We only admire them if they are able to take and make a joke about themselves. We pity them when they take offense and get upset. So too, we ought to grow in our humor skills. When we are the butt of a joke, we need to learn to laugh. If we are telling a joke, we need to make sure the target of our humor has the emotional resilience and sense of humor to enjoy our joke. If not,

we need to save our jokes for those who can handle it.

A7 - Hurting Motivation

When someone is hurt by someone else, they have simply taken offense to the words or actions of others. They feel victimized in some way and might withdraw or worse, retaliate. Retaliation is often worse than the original provocation, which is why we need to be very cautious around people who feel hurt by us. They very well could have the capacity and inner motivation to damage us. In fact, the worst acts of violence are committed by those who feel like victims and feel justified in their retaliation.

When someone is mean to you, you have to discern why they are being mean. If they have an A7 motivation and feel hurt by you, you need to as quickly as possible try to figure out what you or someone else did that they took offense to.

Taking offense, from a scientific perspective, involves several areas of psychology and neuroscience, encompassing cognition, emotion, social interactions, and even personal history and culture. While a complete and detailed understanding of the neural mechanisms involved is still a topic of ongoing research, we can discuss some broad aspects:

1. **Cognitive Appraisal:** Offense is generally taken when an individual perceives a situation or behavior as a threat or violation. This process of cognitive appraisal involves evaluating the situation in terms of its relevance to personal goals, values, or well-being. It's a subjective process influenced by an individual's personality, beliefs, values, experiences, and cultural background. NOTE: I have found that if someone is upset with you it's because you have violated a B3 or B4 expectation of theirs. They believe you are either being unfair, blocking their goals, or both.

2. **Emotional Response:** After the cognitive appraisal, if the situation is perceived as offensive, it triggers an emotional response. This could be anger, sadness, disgust, or another negative emotion. The amygdala, a part of the brain involved in

processing emotions, plays a crucial role here, along with other regions involved in emotional regulation, such as the prefrontal cortex.

3. Social/Behavioral Response: The emotional response usually leads to a behavioral response, which can include confrontational behavior, withdrawal, or seeking support from others. This is influenced by social norms, the individual's usual strategies for dealing with negative emotions, and their assessment of the potential consequences of different responses.

4. Psychophysiological Response: Taking offense also triggers a stress response in the body, which can include increased heart rate, blood pressure, and release of stress hormones like cortisol. Over time, frequent or chronic offense-taking and the associated stress response can have negative effects on physical health.

It's also worth mentioning that the process of taking offense is not always conscious. Sometimes, people may react negatively to a situation without being fully aware of why they find it offensive. This can occur due to implicit biases or unprocessed past experiences that influence their perception and emotional reactions.

In terms of the neurobiology of offense, studies suggest that the limbic system (which includes the amygdala and hippocampus and is involved in emotion regulation) and the prefrontal cortex (involved in decision making and social behavior) play important roles in evaluating the perceived violation. It is in the prefrontal cortex that the upset individual will likely experience a B3 & B4 expectation violation and will begin to engage in B7 - B12 distorted interpretations. All these have to be untangled and resolved if reconciliation has a chance. (Forgiveness on their part is the fast-track to reconcile with them.)

Also, it's important to note that offense is largely a social-emotional phenomenon, and social and cultural factors play a huge role. The same situation can be perceived as highly offensive,

slightly offensive, or not at all offensive by different people, or even by the same person at different times, depending on the context and the individual's state of mind. Bottom line, watch out for those who are motivated by A7 Hurt. A7 is the most complicated element to figure out how to navigate and resolve. This is why it's in your best interest to always try your best to accommodate people in the areas of their offenses.

A8 - Criticizing Motivation

Criticism involves evaluating or judging something or someone, often highlighting areas of weakness, error, or disagreement. While it can be constructive or destructive, the impact of criticism largely depends on how it's delivered and received. A wise person learns to appreciate criticism because it just might help them improve. Even unfounded and mean spirited criticisms can be valuable to an emotionally resilient person. However, it can be devastating to someone who is emotionally vulnerable to criticism. I have discovered that people who cannot take criticism are some of the most difficult people to help. Why? Because helping them involves pointing out what they are doing wrong, and if they are sensitive to criticism, they don't want anyone to tell them their flaws. Yikes!

Here's a brief explanation of how criticism typically works:

1. Evaluation: Criticism starts with an evaluation or judgment of someone's behavior, work, or idea. This can be based on certain standards, expectations, or norms that the critic has.

2. Communication: The next step is conveying the criticism. How it's communicated can greatly affect how it's received. Factors like the choice of words, tone of voice, body language, and the relationship between the critic and the recipient all play roles in this.

3. Response: The final step is how the recipient responds to the criticism. They might accept it, reject it, or ignore it. They may also respond emotionally (feeling upset or defensive, for instance)

or cognitively (by reconsidering their behavior or idea).

Why do some people take offense to criticism? Here are a few reasons:

1. **Perceived Negative Intent:** If the criticism is perceived as intentionally harmful, disrespectful, or devaluing, it can be offensive. People are more likely to take offense if they believe the critic is trying to hurt them rather than help them.

2. **Threat to Self-Image:** Criticism can be threatening to one's self-image or ego. It can make a person feel inadequate or flawed, which can be difficult to accept.

3. **Violation of Personal Values or Beliefs:** Criticism might offend if it's seen as an attack on deeply held beliefs or values. This is often the case with criticisms related to identity, culture, religion, or personal lifestyle choices.

4. **Lack of Constructiveness:** Constructive criticism is meant to help the recipient improve or grow, and it's usually delivered respectfully and thoughtfully. Destructive criticism, on the other hand, tends to focus on negatives without providing useful feedback or guidance, and can often feel like a personal attack.

5. **Sensitivity to Negative Evaluation:** Some people are more sensitive to negative evaluation than others. This can be influenced by various factors, including personality traits, past experiences, self-esteem, and mental health issues like anxiety or depression.

To avoid offense, it's often helpful to deliver criticism in a constructive, respectful manner. It can also be useful to consider the recipient's perspective and emotional state, and to choose an appropriate time and place for delivering the criticism.



EXPECTATION

Elements B1 - B6

The reason why people are so offended by A1 - A4 Aggressions is due to their rigid belief system about the aggressions. Dr. Albert Ellis, the psychologist who developed Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), posited that there are six key rigid demands individuals often place upon themselves, others, and the world.

Firstly, two demands are centered around self-perception: "I must be perfect," (B1) and "I must be accepted." (B2) These reflect an inner drive towards perfectionism and a need for approval from others. When individuals feel they aren't living up to these demands, self-loathing can ensue.

The next two demands focus on others: "You must be fair" (B3) and "You must be helpful." (B4) When these expectations aren't met, it

can lead to feelings of frustration and resentment towards others, giving rise to retaliatory feelings.

The final pair of demands pertain to life in general: "Life must be comfortable" (B5) and "Life must turn out ideal." (B6) Unrealistic expectations about the comfort and outcome of life can lead to serious mental health concerns such as suicidal ideation when these demands aren't met.

Interestingly, Ellis's work aligns with some Biblical teachings. The story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness, as told in the book of Matthew, offers an intriguing parallel. Satan tempts Jesus three times, each temptation corresponding with the demands Ellis identified.

The first temptation challenges Jesus to turn stone into bread. This represents the demand for performance and approval - essentially the need to prove oneself. Jesus, however, counters this by asserting his identity and approval as given by God, not by others.

The second temptation is for Jesus to throw himself off a high point, expecting that angels will save him. This temptation speaks to the demand for fairness and the frustration that can come when goals are blocked. Jesus declines, choosing not to test God or to demand particular outcomes.

The final temptation offers Jesus the kingdoms of the world if he bows down to Satan, mirroring the demands for comfort and an ideal life. Jesus again rebuffs this, showing a refusal to demand an easy and ideal life, instead choosing to worship and trust God alone.

Ellis's findings and the story of Jesus's temptations both underscore the problem of grandiosity - the belief that life, people, and oneself must align with specific rigid expectations. The solution, as both Ellis and the Bible suggest, is learning to release these demands, embracing life, people, and self as they are, not as

one might wish them to be.

In essence, the key to psychological well-being is to identify these six rigid demands and work to let go of them. By doing so, one can shift from a demanding and unachievable perfectionism towards acceptance and love for the imperfect reality of life.

I will attempt to describe Ellis' demands in greater detail:

B1 - Perfection Expectation

Perfectionism, according to Ellis, is an irrational demand on the self for several reasons:

1. **Unattainability:** Perfection, by definition, is an impossible standard to meet. Humans are inherently flawed and make mistakes. By insisting on being perfect, individuals set themselves up for continual disappointment and feelings of inadequacy.
2. **Counter-productive:** Ellis suggested that demanding perfection from oneself can actually impede performance and achievement. The anxiety and stress that accompany perfectionism can make it more difficult to complete tasks or reach goals.
3. **Unnecessary:** According to Ellis, individuals often believe they must be perfect to be accepted or loved. However, this is not true. People can and are accepted and loved despite their flaws and imperfections.
4. **Harmful to mental health:** Perfectionism can lead to a range of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. It can contribute to chronic dissatisfaction, self-criticism, and low self-esteem.

Ellis's REBT aims to address such irrational beliefs through cognitive restructuring techniques. The goal is to replace these harmful, irrational beliefs with healthier, rational alternatives. Instead of demanding perfection from oneself, Ellis would encourage accepting oneself as inherently valuable, regardless of performance or achievements.

B2 - Approval Expectation

Albert Ellis identified the demand for approval as another irrational belief that can lead to emotional distress and psychological problems. According to Ellis, individuals often hold a strong belief that they must be approved or loved by significant others in their lives. They may believe that their self-worth depends on the approval of others and that they are inadequate or unlovable if others disapprove of them.

However, Ellis viewed this demand for approval as irrational for several reasons:

1. **Uncontrollable:** The belief that we must be universally loved and approved by others is irrational because it's impossible to control other people's opinions or feelings. Each individual has their own unique perspectives, experiences, and values that shape their views.
2. **Dependent on external validation:** This belief suggests that a person's worth is contingent upon external validation rather than intrinsic worth. It can lead to a fragile self-esteem that is susceptible to the slightest hint of criticism or rejection.
3. **Unnecessary:** Ellis pointed out that approval from others, while nice to have, is not a necessity for survival or for a fulfilling life. Furthermore, being disapproved of or rejected does not diminish a person's inherent worth.
4. **Leads to anxiety and fear:** The constant striving for approval often results in fear of rejection, anxiety, and hypersensitivity to criticism. It can also lead to people-pleasing behaviors and inauthenticity as individuals might suppress their true selves to gain approval.

Ellis encouraged individuals to challenge and change their irrational beliefs about approval. He promoted the idea of unconditional self-acceptance, where a person's worth is independent of the approval or disapproval of others. By accepting

oneself unconditionally, individuals can lead more authentic, fulfilling lives free from the constant fear of rejection.

B3 - Fairness Expectation

Ellis identified a "fairness demand" as an irrational belief that people often impose on others. This belief is based on the assumption that other people and the world at large must act fairly and equitably at all times.

According to Ellis, this belief is irrational for several reasons:

1. **Subjectivity of Fairness:** The concept of fairness can vary greatly among different people. What seems fair to one person may not be fair to another. As such, expecting others to always behave according to one's subjective idea of fairness is unrealistic.
2. **Inability to Control Others:** Just as with the demand for approval, it's impossible to control the actions and attitudes of others. Holding a rigid belief that others must act fairly sets up a person for continual disappointment and frustration when others do not meet these expectations.
3. **Impracticality:** Life is often not fair, and circumstances do not always occur in a way that is equitable or just. Insisting on fairness in all situations is not aligned with the realities of life.
4. **Emotional Disturbance:** This rigid demand for fairness often leads to anger, resentment, and ongoing interpersonal conflicts when others do not meet these fairness expectations.

Ellis encouraged individuals to challenge and change their irrational beliefs about fairness. He advocated for a more flexible, tolerant view of others, recognizing that while we can prefer and strive for fairness, it is not a necessity and other people will often act in ways we perceive as unfair. By relinquishing this demand, individuals can better manage their emotional responses and cultivate healthier interpersonal relationships.

B4 - Helpful Expectation

Ellis identified "frustration intolerance" as an irrational belief often imposed on others. This belief is centered around the idea that other people should not do anything to frustrate one's goals or block their paths to achievement or satisfaction.

Ellis posited this belief as irrational due to several reasons:

1. **Reality of Life:** Obstacles and frustrations are a natural part of life. The assumption that our paths should always be clear and others should never frustrate us is unrealistic.
2. **Inability to Control Others:** We cannot control the actions, decisions, or behaviors of others. Expecting that others should always act in ways that align with our plans is irrational, as people have their own desires, intentions, and circumstances which may differ from ours.
3. **Lack of Tolerance:** This belief suggests an absence of tolerance or acceptance of normal human behavior. People make mistakes, act selfishly at times, and have their own agendas, which may inadvertently or deliberately frustrate our goals.
4. **Emotional Consequences:** Holding tightly to this belief often leads to feelings of anger, resentment, or bitterness when our goals are frustrated. These negative emotions can cause significant stress and damage to our relationships.

Ellis suggested that people challenge and change their irrational beliefs about frustration intolerance. Instead of demanding that others never frustrate us, he encouraged developing a higher level of tolerance for frustration, understanding that it is a part of life. By doing so, individuals can better manage their emotional responses and have more satisfying and less conflict-laden relationships.

B5 - Comfort Expectation

Ellis recognized "comfort demands" as a common irrational belief directed towards life. This belief centers around the idea that life must always be comfortable, easy, and devoid of hardship or

discomfort.

This demand is considered irrational for several reasons:

1. **Unrealistic Expectation:** Life, by its very nature, includes periods of discomfort, hardship, and challenge. To expect that life should always be comfortable and easy is to deny this fundamental reality.
2. **Lack of Resilience:** Holding the belief that life must be comfortable often leads to an inability to tolerate or effectively cope with adversity. This can result in an avoidance of beneficial growth opportunities that may come from confronting and overcoming challenges.
3. **Negative Emotional Consequences:** When the inevitable discomforts of life occur, people with strong comfort demands often experience intense negative emotions such as anxiety, depression, or anger. This can cause significant distress and hinder their ability to effectively navigate these situations.
4. **Limiting Life Experience:** The demand for comfort can lead to a narrow and limited life experience. By avoiding discomfort at all costs, individuals may miss out on meaningful experiences and opportunities for personal growth that often come from stepping out of one's comfort zone.

Ellis advocated for a shift from rigid demands for comfort to flexible preferences. He encouraged people to accept and embrace the reality of life's discomforts, develop resilience in the face of adversity, and find fulfillment and growth through the process of overcoming life's challenges.

B6 - Ideal Demand

Ellis viewed "idealistic demands" as irrational beliefs directed towards life. This belief manifests as the insistence that life must unfold exactly as we have envisioned or planned. This demand is considered irrational for several key reasons:

1. **Unrealistic Expectation:** It's a fundamental fact of life that things often do not go as planned. Unpredictability is an inherent aspect of existence, and no one can control or foresee every event in life. Insisting that life must align with our ideal vision is denying the unpredictability and randomness of life.

2. **Inflexibility:** This kind of demand for life to match one's ideal vision often results in rigidity and inflexibility. Such individuals are often unable to adapt when life does not align with their envisioned plan, leading to excessive stress, dissatisfaction, and disappointment.

3. **Negative Emotional Consequences:** When life doesn't go according to plan, individuals with strong idealistic demands often experience intense negative emotions such as frustration, anger, and disappointment. They might struggle with feelings of failure or inadequacy if their life doesn't match the 'ideal' they've envisioned.

4. **Prevents Growth:** This belief can stifle personal growth. When faced with unexpected circumstances or outcomes, there's often an opportunity for learning and growth. However, those caught up in their rigid expectations might miss these chances, as they are too focused on the divergence from their plans.

Ellis proposed the shift from rigid demands to flexible preferences. He encouraged individuals to set goals and have preferences about their life's direction but to remain open to change and adaptable when life doesn't go according to their envisioned plan. The ultimate aim was to cultivate an attitude of acceptance and adaptability towards life's unpredictability, thereby promoting better emotional health and well-being.



INTERPRETATION

Elements B7 - B12

The cognitive distortions listed in B7 - B12 are widely discussed in psychological literature, thanks to the substantial contributions from professionals such as Aaron Beck, David D. Burns, and Albert Ellis. While B1 - B6 dealt with irrational *expectations* of reality, B7 - B12 dealt with distorted *interpretations* of reality.

Firstly, there's "black and white thinking," or "all or nothing thinking." (B7) It's a perspective where if one cannot achieve a specific desired outcome, then they will not attempt at all. For example, if they can't get the job they want, they won't take any job, or if they can't win the championship, they refuse to play. This thought process discards the possibilities that lie in the gray areas of life, representing a cognitive distortion because life is, in fact, full of gray areas.

Next, we have "labeling." (B8) This distortion involves categorizing someone or oneself based on a single action or characteristic. For instance, if someone lies, they are labeled a "liar," or if someone fails, they see themselves as a "failure."

Then, there's "magnifying" or "minimizing." (B9) Magnifying involves blowing a situation out of proportion, while minimizing is reducing the importance of significant events. For instance, one might downplay the impact of a daughter's pregnancy or a spouse wanting to leave. Both distortions prevent individuals from evaluating situations accurately.

This is where therapy or coaching can prove beneficial. It can serve as a form of cognitive dialysis, filtering out distorted and harmful thoughts and replacing them with healthier perspectives. It can help you view situations from a different lens, which can be immensely helpful.

There's also "jumping to conclusions" (B10) which happens when someone thinks they know what is going to happen in the future, or they think they can know what someone is thinking by observing their facial expressions or knowing their history. This is a common mistake that can work us up into a frenzy if we are not careful.

Then there is "catastrophizing," (B11) which is a tendency to assume the worst-case scenario. There's also "personalization," (B12) which involves attributing unrelated events to oneself. I recall a time when I was working for an organization named Focus on the Family at the age of 18. Once, I flushed the toilet and an alarm system went off. For a moment, I thought I had triggered the alarm, a classic example of personalization.

These cognitive distortions are widespread and recognizing them is the first step towards addressing and managing them more effectively. I'll describe them now in greater detail.

B7 - Black or White Interpretation

"Black and white thinking," also known as "all-or-nothing thinking" or "dichotomous thinking," is a type of cognitive distortion where a person views situations, experiences, or self and others in extreme, binary terms with no middle ground or gray areas. It's as though everything is categorized into one of two extremes—good or bad, success or failure, perfect or flawed, and so on.

This kind of thinking can often lead to unrealistic standards and unnecessary stress or disappointment. For instance, if someone believes they must always perform perfectly, then anything less than perfection may be viewed as a total failure. This is unrealistic and unkind, as everyone makes mistakes, and nobody can be perfect all the time. By viewing things in black and white terms, one fails to appreciate the nuances and complexities inherent in most situations.

A common example could be a student who gets a B on a test and concludes, "I'm a complete failure." In this instance, the student is not taking into account the possibility that a B is still a good grade, or that one test does not define their overall academic ability or self-worth.

Black and white thinking can be problematic as it contributes to overgeneralization, jumping to conclusions, magnification or minimization, and can potentially lead to stress, anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) often helps individuals identify this type of cognitive distortion and work toward a more balanced, nuanced perspective.

B8 - Labeling Interpretation

"Labeling" is a cognitive distortion where an individual assigns a label to themselves or others based on a limited amount of information or a single event. This oversimplified way of thinking often leads to sweeping, negative generalizations that don't

accurately reflect reality.

For instance, if a person makes a mistake, they might label themselves as a "failure" or "incompetent", rather than recognizing that everyone makes mistakes and that one mistake doesn't define their entire character or ability. In other words, they are defining their entire self by a single event or behavior.

Similarly, if someone else makes a mistake or treats them poorly, they might label that person as "rude" or "mean", without considering the possibility that the person may be having a bad day or going through a difficult time.

Labeling can be harmful because it leads to an overly negative and simplistic view of oneself or others. It reinforces a fixed mindset, inhibits personal growth, and can contribute to poor mental health, including feelings of worthlessness, anxiety, and depression.

Through CBT, people can learn to recognize and challenge labeling and other cognitive distortions, which can help them develop a more nuanced, compassionate understanding of themselves and others.

B9 - Magnifying Interpretation

"Magnifying" is a cognitive distortion, often referred to as "catastrophizing," where an individual gives disproportionate weight to negative events, situations, or perceived shortcomings, amplifying them to a level that far exceeds their objective importance or severity. It's like looking at one's problems through a magnifying glass, hence the term.

This tendency can lead people to blow out of proportion minor mistakes, setbacks, or perceived slights, which in turn can generate significant stress, anxiety, or depression. For instance, someone may receive constructive feedback at work and interpret it as a sign that they are completely incompetent and about to lose their job. They've magnified a small piece of criticism into a

career-ending catastrophe.

Magnifying can also involve the tendency to obsessively ruminate over worst-case scenarios, even when they are very unlikely. An individual may feel a minor symptom, like a headache, and immediately assume that they have a life-threatening disease, rather than considering more probable causes like stress or dehydration.

CBT can be very effective in helping individuals recognize and challenge this cognitive distortion, providing strategies to reframe thought processes into healthier, more balanced perspectives.

B10 - Jumping To Conclusions Interpretation

Jumping to conclusions is a cognitive distortion where an individual makes quick assumptions or interpretations about situations, events, or others' behavior without having sufficient evidence to support their conclusions. It can manifest in two primary ways: mind reading and fortune telling.

1. Mind reading: This is where an individual assumes they know what others are thinking or feeling, usually thinking it's negative, without any clear indication or evidence. For example, if a friend doesn't reply to a text message immediately, a person might jump to the conclusion that the friend is upset with them, when in reality, the friend may simply be busy.

2. Fortune telling: This involves predicting future outcomes, typically negative ones, without any substantial evidence. For instance, if a person has a job interview and jumps to the conclusion that they won't get the job before even having the interview, they're engaging in fortune telling.

These hasty judgments can create unnecessary stress, anxiety, and negative feelings, as they often lead to the worst possible interpretation of a situation. The solution to fixing this distortion is to help individuals recognize and address this

cognitive distortion, encouraging more rational and evidence-based thinking.

B11 - Catastrophizing Interpretation

Catastrophizing is a cognitive distortion where a person exaggerates the implications or consequences of an event, situation, or experience, often predicting the worst possible outcome. It's akin to "making a mountain out of a molehill" or believing that a minor setback is a major disaster.

There are two forms of catastrophizing:

1. Predictive Catastrophizing: This involves anticipating the worst possible outcome in the future. For example, if you have a small disagreement with your partner, you might start thinking, "This is the beginning of the end. Our relationship is doomed."
2. Interpretative Catastrophizing: This form of catastrophizing involves perceiving a situation as terrible or unbearable, even if it's relatively minor. For instance, if you make a small mistake at work, you might think, "This is terrible. I'll never recover from this. I'm going to get fired."

Catastrophizing can lead to high levels of anxiety and can contribute to the onset or worsening of mental health issues like depression, anxiety disorders, and panic disorders. The solution is to challenge these catastrophizing thoughts, thereby reducing their impact on your mental health.

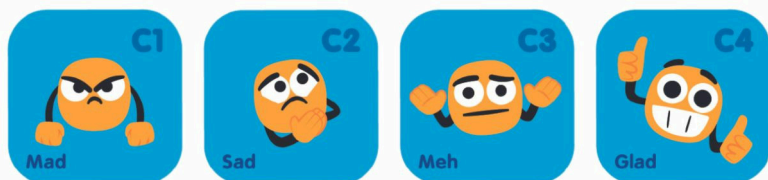
B12 - Personalizing Interpretation

Personalizing is a cognitive distortion where an individual blames themselves for events or situations that are not entirely within their control. This involves attributing the negative behavior of others or the outcome of situations to oneself, even when there is no logical reason to do so.

For instance, if someone close to you is in a bad mood, you might immediately assume that it's because of something you did or didn't do. If a project fails at work, even if it was a team effort,

you may take all the responsibility for its failure. Or if you hear that your friends went out without inviting you, you might think that it's because they don't like you, rather than considering other possibilities such as it was a spontaneous plan, or they thought you were busy.

Personalizing can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and inadequacy, as the person constantly feels at fault. The solution to this distortion is to identify, challenge, and alter these distorted thought patterns, enabling a more balanced and accurate perspective of oneself and one's role in various situations.



EMOTION

Elements C1 - C4

When an individual approaches me, confessing that they've been a victim of bullying, I naturally ask about the circumstances (What happened?). As they recount the incident, I follow up inquiring about the aggressors motivation (Why did they do that?).

My advice generally steers right away towards emotional resilience: shake off the negativity and strive to remain unfazed. However, it is not uncommon for individuals to remain disturbed. This prompts me to examine their emotional consequences, denoted as (C), before deconstructing their belief systems (B). The reason for this is that the action (A), and the emotional consequences, (C), usually occur in rapid succession, leaving the belief system, (B), as an area to examine later.

To gauge their emotional response, I introduce a concept I call the 'Demand-O-Meter'. This meter gauges their demands and emotional consequences in the forms of anger (C1), sadness (C2), indifference (C3), or joy (C4), giving us a snapshot of their emotional state.

The emotional consequences (C) manifest in many ways. The emoji I designed for this part of the SQUABBLES Elements show both the emotional facial expression along with the body language of the arms. I'll attempt to unpack each major emotion.

C1 - Mad Emotion

Observe the correlation between the rigidity of one's posture and their level of discontent. A rigid posture often signifies an unwavering demand, reflecting a belief that certain things should not occur.

This rigidity, these inflexible demands, often lead to distress when reality does not align with them. That is why the rigid emoji is labeled "mad". Therefore, the optimal strategy here is to relinquish the firm grip on these unwavering demands. Loosen the hold and adapt to the circumstances. A denial of harsh realities and an insistence that certain events should not happen can cause profound distress. I have found that people who are used to getting what they want have the hardest time leaving the "mad" state.

Feeling anger when you don't get your way is a common human response, and it can be explained from both a psychological and a biological perspective.

1. Expectations and Frustration: You might feel anger because you had a specific expectation that was not met. Our brains like predictability and control, and when things don't go as planned, we can feel frustrated and angry. This can be particularly true if you've invested a lot of time, energy, or resources into something, and then don't get the outcome you wanted.

2. **Perceived Injustice:** If you believe you've been treated unfairly or your desires or needs have been ignored, it can lead to feelings of anger. This is related to our innate sense of fairness and justice.

3. **Perceived Threat:** Anger is often a response to a perceived threat. This doesn't have to be a physical threat; it could be a threat to your status, self-esteem, or autonomy. When you don't get your way, you might perceive it as a threat to your ability to control your environment or achieve your goals, which can trigger feelings of anger.

4. **Biological Factors:** The body's stress response can also play a role in feelings of anger. When things don't go as planned, it can cause stress, which triggers a series of biological reactions designed to help us respond to a threat. This includes the release of hormones like adrenaline, which can increase feelings of anger and aggression.

If you find that you often feel angry when you don't get your way, it might be beneficial to work on strategies to manage these feelings. This could include techniques for managing expectations, developing better frustration tolerance, improving communication and negotiation skills, or practicing stress management techniques like mindfulness or relaxation exercises. It might also be helpful to work with a therapist or counselor who can provide further guidance and support.

C2 - Sad Emotion

Notice the arms on this particular emoji are more flexible. They are in a position of desire, as opposed to a demand. They are not as rigid as C1, but nonetheless, there is hope that one gets something that they wish for. When the desire is unmet, disappointment is experienced emotionally and can be seen in the image as tears flowing from the eyes.

Feeling sadness when you don't get what you hoped for is a natural response, often related to disappointment, loss, and

unmet expectations. Here's a more detailed explanation:

1. **Disappointment and Unmet Expectations:** One of the main reasons we feel sadness in these situations is disappointment. You had hoped for a particular outcome, and when that doesn't happen, you experience the emotional pain of unmet expectations. It's a natural response to dealing with circumstances that did not unfold as we wanted or envisioned.

2. **Sense of Loss:** Even if what you were hoping for was something you didn't have yet (like a job, a recognition, a relationship), you might still feel a sense of loss when you don't get it. This is because you likely invested time, energy, and emotional resources into that hope. When it doesn't come to fruition, it's normal to grieve for what could have been.

3. **Self-esteem and Self-worth:** Sometimes, not getting what we hoped for can lead to self-doubt or feelings of low self-worth. If you equate your value or abilities with external success or recognition, falling short of your hopes can make you feel inadequate or undeserving.

4. **Uncertainty about the Future:** If what you hoped for was important for your future plans (like a college acceptance or a promotion), not getting it might make you feel uncertain or anxious about what lies ahead. This uncertainty can lead to feelings of sadness.

To cope with such feelings, it's important to practice self-compassion and understand that it's okay to feel sad. Over time, try to adjust your expectations and learn to be flexible with outcomes. It's also helpful to separate your self-worth from external achievements and understand that it's normal not to get everything you hope for. Consider seeking help from a therapist or counselor if these feelings persist or cause significant distress.

C3 - Meh Emotion

Notice in this emoji how the arms have a "whatever, I don't care"

posture. When we give up the grip of our demands, rid ourselves of any desire that things are different, we enter an emotional state of indifference and even acceptance.

Feeling indifferent about disappointments can be seen in two primary ways, both of which can potentially have positive aspects.

1. **Resilience:** Indifference can be a sign of resilience, an important psychological trait that allows individuals to bounce back from disappointments and setbacks. Resilient individuals do not allow failure or disappointment to deter them; instead, they learn from these experiences and use them as stepping stones for future actions. They understand that life is filled with ups and downs, and that not every effort will be successful. This can lead to a more balanced, less stressful approach to life's challenges.

2. **Detachment:** Indifference can also be a form of emotional detachment, which, when balanced, can be healthy. It can prevent you from being overly affected by outcomes beyond your control, enabling you to remain steady despite life's fluctuations. This kind of detachment is often associated with mindfulness and acceptance, two key elements in many forms of meditation and mental health practices.

However, it's important to differentiate between healthy detachment and avoidance or suppression of emotions. If indifference towards disappointments is resulting from an avoidance of emotional pain, it might be worth exploring this with a mental health professional, as this can potentially lead to other issues over time.

Feeling indifferent towards disappointments can be beneficial by reducing stress, increasing resilience, and promoting emotional stability. It allows you to take disappointments in stride, learn from them, and move forward without excessive emotional turmoil. This can lead to better decision-making, as decisions are less likely to be clouded by intense emotional reactions.

Moreover, it can free up mental and emotional energy that can be used for other, more productive tasks. You're less likely to dwell on the negatives and more likely to focus on actions that can lead to personal growth and the achievement of your goals. However, remember that it's normal and healthy to experience a range of emotions, including negative ones. They are part of the human experience and can provide valuable information about our needs, values, and desires.

Indifference and acceptance can sometimes appear similar, but they have distinct meanings and emotional underpinnings:

1. **Indifference:** Indifference is a state of not caring or being unconcerned about something. It's a lack of interest or emotion toward an outcome or event. It suggests a level of disconnection, as if the event or outcome doesn't matter at all. While this can sometimes be beneficial, as in avoiding unnecessary stress over things outside of one's control, it can also be a sign of disengagement or lack of empathy if taken to the extreme.

2. **Acceptance:** Acceptance, on the other hand, does not mean a lack of care or concern. Rather, it is an active process of acknowledging reality as it is, without trying to change or deny it. It involves recognizing a situation, understanding it, and willingly agreeing to tolerate it as it is, even if it is not preferred or ideal. Acceptance is often an important part of stress management and is a cornerstone of many types of cognitive therapy, such as Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

The relationship between indifference and acceptance can be nuanced. While they both can involve a lack of overt emotional reaction to a situation, the emotional and cognitive processes underlying each are different. Indifference may be more about not caring, while acceptance is about recognizing and willingly embracing reality, even if it involves negative or difficult circumstances.

In a healthy psychological context, what might appear as "indifference" could actually be a form of "acceptance". It's not that one doesn't care about the outcome, but rather they understand and accept what has happened without letting it disturb their peace of mind. This state of acceptance can lead to a greater sense of calm, resilience, and emotional flexibility, thereby promoting overall mental well-being.

C4 - Glad Emotion

Notice on this emoji, the facial expression is one of gladness and the arms have a thumbs up posture to them. This is the goal for our resilience building efforts. We want to learn how to be glad when bad things happen to us. It is possible, although not always easy.

Learning to find gladness in unwanted or difficult circumstances is a process that requires a shift in perspective and often some time and effort. Here are some strategies to guide you:

1. **Reframing:** This is a cognitive behavioral technique that involves changing your perspective on a situation to see it in a different light. Instead of focusing on the negatives of an unwanted event, try to find the positives. For example, if you lose your job, it's normal to feel upset and worried. However, you could reframe this as an opportunity to explore new career options, learn new skills, or find a job that offers a better work-life balance.

2. **Gratitude:** Try to practice gratitude. Even in difficult times, there are likely things you can be thankful for. Focusing on these can shift your mood and perspective. It can be as simple as being grateful for your health, having a supportive friend, or even the learning opportunity that this challenge provides.

3. **Growth Mindset:** Cultivate a growth mindset. This is the belief that challenges and failures are opportunities for growth and learning. People with a growth mindset are better able to bounce back from setbacks because they see them as temporary hurdles

rather than insurmountable obstacles.

4. **Resilience Building:** Work on building your resilience. This involves various strategies, including maintaining a positive outlook, practicing good self-care, staying connected with your support system, and seeking professional help if needed.

5. **Mindfulness and Acceptance:** Practice mindfulness and acceptance. Mindfulness involves staying present and fully experiencing your feelings without judgment. Acceptance, on the other hand, involves acknowledging your situation without trying to change or avoid it. This can help alleviate the resistance and struggle that comes with wanting things to be different than they are.

6. **Seek Meaning:** Sometimes, finding gladness in unwanted events comes from finding meaning or purpose in them. This could involve using the experience to help others, learning something about yourself, or growing in a way that wouldn't have been possible without the experience.

Remember that it's normal and healthy to feel upset, frustrated, or sad when unwanted events occur. It's important to allow yourself to feel these feelings rather than suppress them. Over time, with the above strategies, you might find yourself gradually able to see these events in a more positive light and even derive gladness from them.

The Benefits of Resilience

Resilience is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or adapt in the face of adversity. It's the mental, emotional, and physical toughness that some people develop to overcome stress, trauma, or hardship. Essentially, it's a person's ability to bounce back from negative experiences.

Resilient people are able to harness inner strength and rebound more readily from a setback or challenge, whether it's job loss, illness, disaster, the death of a loved one, or any other type of life

stress. They don't avoid the hardship, but face it head-on and work through it. They also learn from the experience and often come out stronger than before.

Here are some benefits of being resilient:

1. **Better Handling of Stress:** Resilient individuals are better equipped to navigate through stressful situations, reducing the potential negative impact on their mental health.
2. **Faster Recovery from Setbacks:** They can bounce back from failures or mistakes more quickly, viewing them as temporary setbacks rather than insurmountable problems.
3. **Learning from Failure:** Resilience helps individuals learn and grow from failures, turning negatives into positives.
4. **Improved Physical Health:** By effectively managing stress and avoiding chronic stress conditions, resilient people often enjoy better physical health.

The Benefits of a Growth Mindset

Growth Mindset, a term coined by psychologist Carol Dweck, refers to the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed and improved through dedication, hard work, and the right kind of effort. It's the opposite of a fixed mindset, where people believe their abilities are unchangeable.

Here are some benefits of having a growth mindset:

1. **Increased Motivation and Effort:** People with a growth mindset tend to be more motivated and put in more effort, believing that they can improve with hard work.
2. **Greater Resilience:** They are more resilient in the face of failures or challenges, viewing them as opportunities for learning and growth.
3. **Lifelong Learning:** A growth mindset fosters a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishment.

4. **Better Performance:** Research shows that individuals with a growth mindset often outperform those with a fixed mindset, because they embrace challenges, treat failures as opportunities to learn, and believe in their ability to develop and improve.

Both resilience and a growth mindset are valuable qualities that can be nurtured and developed. They are key to personal development, success, and well-being.

The Benefits of Post-Traumatic Growth

Post-traumatic growth (PTG) is a theory that explains the positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. These circumstances represent significant challenges to the adaptive resources of the individual and pose significant challenges to individuals' way of understanding the world and their place in it.

Developed by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun in the mid-1990s, the concept of PTG differs from resilience in that resilience is about bouncing back to a previous state of normal functioning, while PTG implies experiencing growth beyond previous functioning.

In other words, post-traumatic growth is the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with a major life crisis or a traumatic event. It's not about returning to the same life as it was previously experienced before trauma; instead, it is about undergoing significant evolutionary change.

The concept does not imply that trauma is good or that suffering should be ignored. It doesn't mean that people will no longer feel distress related to the trauma. Instead, it suggests that individuals can find some sense of improvement or personal development while dealing with the aftermath of trauma.

Examples of post-traumatic growth might include:

1. **Increased personal strength:** Recognizing personal strength

and resilience as a result of coping with the trauma.

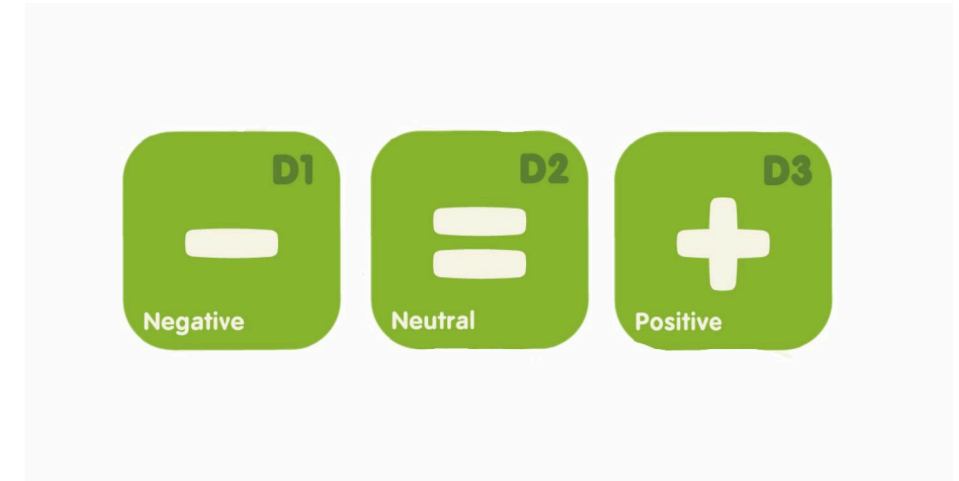
2. Greater appreciation for life: Adopting a new outlook on life or a shift in values and priorities.

3. Richer interpersonal relationships: Deepening relationships or experiencing increased compassion and empathy for others.

4. New possibilities or paths for one's life: Seeing new possibilities or a new purpose in life.

5. Spiritual growth or development: Experiencing a deepening of spiritual life or change in beliefs.

The potential benefits of post-traumatic growth can be substantial. They might include increased personal resilience, deeper relationships, a greater appreciation for life, a stronger sense of personal priorities, and a heightened perception of personal strength and capability.



EVALUATION

Elements D1 - D3

So, how can we help individuals loosen their grip on these stubborn demands? How can we guide them to release madness and embrace sadness, which, while still a negative emotion, is more manageable and less destructive than anger? It's a common emotional journey for people to oscillate between anger and sadness, fluctuating based on their recollections and triggers.

When asked about their position on the Demand-O-Meter (C1 - C4), many report residing somewhere between anger (C1) and sadness (C2). My goal then becomes nudging them towards indifference (C3), or even better, joy (C4). Yes, it's possible to find joy even in adversity. This is a quality that entrepreneurs harness effectively, transforming negative circumstances into

opportunities.

The resilient person's perspective of "the worst thing that ever happened to us can actually be the best thing for us" is essentially about problem-solving and resilience. They see problems from a different angle, transforming seemingly adverse situations into opportunities. This is the essence of resilience in business and personal life - to shift from merely accepting a negative event to finding joy in it and exploiting it for growth and advancement.

To help a person go from mad, to sad, to meh, to glad, I developed a three-part strategy that helps someone reframe the unwanted event by asking some very logical questions that become a cognitive exercise that I believe paves neural pathways in the brain to better accept and adjust to harsh realities. (Review the D1 - D3 Elements)

Before the dawn of modern science and particularly neuroscience in the past 30 years, wisdom was our guiding light. Though neuroscience continues to evolve in the current age of discovery, the complete understanding of the brain remains elusive. However, I often ponder how people coped with life's trials and tribulations, like death or divorce, thousands of years ago. How did mothers teach their children to cope with disappointments such as injuries preventing them from pursuing their dreams?

I believe historical advice around the globe follows a pattern: negative, neutral, positive.

D1 - Negative Evaluation

The 'negative' involves comparing one's adversity against something worse, thereby reducing its perceived severity. We often hear the question, "how could this be worse?" This helps put our struggles in perspective, making our perceived 'rock bottom' seem less severe.

Critics might ask why we should compare our hardships to those of others. The answer lies in context. Biographies, for instance,

show us that many have endured and overcome worse. It's not to undermine the significance of their challenges, but rather to provide perspective and instill resilience.

A useful exercise I suggest is to ask a child if they've faced anything worse than their current situation. If they answer affirmatively and acknowledge they've overcome that, it instills confidence and resilience. It helps them understand that things could be worse, and they've already proved their strength in the past.

Comparing our sad situation to others who have it worse can be therapeutic for several reasons:

1. **Perspective:** It allows us to gain a broader perspective on our own troubles. When we're in the midst of suffering, we often get tunnel vision, focusing solely on our own pain and hardship. Seeing that others have gone through, and even overcome, worse situations can put our own problems into context and show us that they might not be as insurmountable as we originally thought.
2. **Gratitude:** This comparison can also foster a sense of gratitude for what we do have. By realizing that others have faced more severe hardships, we can start to appreciate the positive aspects of our lives that we may have previously overlooked.
3. **Resilience:** By looking at how others have navigated through their adversities, we can learn coping mechanisms and strategies that may help us in dealing with our own situation. This can build our resilience and improve our capacity to handle future challenges.
4. **Connection:** This practice can also create a sense of connection and shared humanity. It helps us realize that we're not alone in our suffering and can promote empathy and compassion.
5. **Hope:** Lastly, knowing that others have faced worse situations and survived can instill hope. It reassures us that it's possible to

overcome adversity, no matter how difficult it might seem.

However, it's important to remember that everyone's experience with suffering is unique and deeply personal. While this strategy can be beneficial for some, it might not work for everyone, and it should never be used to dismiss or minimize someone's feelings or experiences.

D2 - Neutral Evaluation

Once a person realizes that their situation could have been worse, they often express sadness or regret that the event happened at all. At this point, I introduce a leading question to help neutralize their adversity, "Why won't this matter in your future?" I don't ask if it will matter, as that invites catastrophizing. I want to lead them towards resilience and understanding that the harsh reality's impact will eventually fade.

Realizing that our current sad situation will not really matter in the future can be therapeutic for several reasons:

1. **Temporal Perspective:** It provides a broader temporal perspective that our present moment is only a small portion of our entire life. Knowing that things can and often do change helps us to endure difficult times.
2. **Hope:** Understanding that future circumstances may improve provides a sense of hope. It helps us to recognize that our current predicament is not necessarily a life sentence and things can get better.
3. **Relativity:** It diminishes the relative importance of the current problem. When we realize that in the grand scheme of our life this specific situation may not matter as much as we think, it can lessen the emotional burden we're carrying.
4. **Empowerment:** Knowing that the future can be different, we may feel empowered to take steps to change our situation or at least to cope with it more effectively.

5. **Resilience:** Accepting that life involves a mix of good and bad times can foster resilience. We learn that we can survive hardships and that they often make us stronger and more resourceful.

However, while this realization can be therapeutic, it's also crucial to address the current situation appropriately. If it involves factors like mental illness or serious life challenges, professional help may be necessary. It's important to balance a future-oriented perspective with appropriate attention to present needs.

D3 - Positive Evaluation

Finally, I encourage them to find positivity in their situation by asking, "How could this turn out for your good?" This moves them from indifference to positivity and instills resilience, an attractive and empowering trait.

Realizing that our sad situation can turn out for our good can be therapeutic due to several reasons:

1. **Promotes Growth:** Struggles often lead to personal growth and development. Adversity can teach us resilience, patience, and empathy. These lessons and strengths can be valuable in future challenges.
2. **Fosters Resilience:** This perspective helps cultivate resilience, as we begin to see our struggles not as insurmountable obstacles but as experiences that can ultimately make us stronger.
3. **Creates Empathy:** Going through tough times can deepen our understanding and empathy towards others who are suffering, making us more compassionate human beings.
4. **Motivates Change:** When we recognize that a difficult situation can potentially lead to positive change, it can motivate us to take steps towards that change. This could mean seeking help, making lifestyle changes, or shifting our perspective.
5. **Inspires Hope:** The possibility of a brighter future can bring

hope, making our current circumstances more bearable. Hope can have profound effects on our mental and physical well-being.

6. Provides Perspective: It can help us see beyond the pain of the present, understanding that our current situation is not definitive and that we can come out of it with valuable experiences and lessons.

As an example of finding the good in the bad, I often share the story of my wife, who, despite being a quadriplegic, possesses this resilient mindset. She sees the potential good in her situation and is grateful for the capabilities she does possess, rather than dwelling on her disability.

In another instance, when our dog tragically jumped from a moving car and was killed, I instantly accepted the reality of the situation. It was devastating, but I managed to see how it could have been worse (it could have been a child), why it wouldn't matter in my future (pets pass away, and we get new ones), and how it could turn out for the good (the dog had been causing issues in our home with excessive barking). Accepting harsh realities and finding the benefit in them is crucial for resilience.

This process is not only helpful in personal resilience but also for teaching my children about faith and life's realities. It isn't a guarantee against hardship, but a source of strength to endure them. It's about building resilience to life's inevitable storms and understanding that knowing God doesn't make us immune to life's troubles; rather, it equips us to handle them with grace and resilience.



REACTION

Elements E1 - E4

Believe it or not, it is quite simple to resolve conflicts once you know WHY someone is being mean to you. A5 - A8 Elements will give us a clue why someone is being aggressive towards us.

This is why it is absolutely critical to ask someone who is complaining about a social problem "Why did they do that?" Once you find out why, you will identify the bulls eye for resolving the problem. When you get really good at this, you will resolve problems quicker than it took for them to appear!

Each A5 - A8 motivation has a matching E1 - E4 reaction. For example:

- The best response to an A5 Bothering Motivation is the E1

Unfazed Reaction.

- The best response to an A6 Joking Motivation is the E2 Laughing Reaction.
- The best response to an A7 Hurting Motivation is the E3 Apology Reaction.
- The best response to an A8 Criticizing Motivation is the E4 Thank You Reaction.

E1 - Unfazed Reaction

I promise, you can become quite proficient at being unfazed by everyday irritants. Instead of being known as high strung or highly irritable, you can become known as someone who is easy going and rarely upset. There are some practical disciplines you can adopt to help. Consider these:

1. **Practice Mindfulness:** Mindfulness involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It can help you become more aware of your reactions to irritations and give you the space to choose a different response. Mindfulness can be cultivated through practices like meditation, mindful breathing, prayer, or simply paying more focused attention to daily activities.

2. **Cognitive Reframing:** Cognitive reframing, also known as cognitive restructuring, involves changing your perspective on a situation to reduce its emotional impact. For example, instead of getting irritated by a traffic jam, you could view it as an opportunity to listen to your favorite podcast or enjoy some quiet time.

3. **Improve Emotional Regulation:** Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and respond to an emotional experience in a controlled manner. This can be improved by practices like deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and other stress management techniques. Therapy or simply talking to a wise friend can also help improve emotional regulation skills.

4. **Regular Exercise:** Physical activity can reduce stress, improve mood, and increase your tolerance for irritation. This can be any

type of activity you enjoy, such as walking, running, swimming, stretching, or team sports.

5. **Good Sleep and Nutrition:** Lack of sleep and poor nutrition can make you more susceptible to irritability. Try to establish a regular sleep schedule and maintain a balanced diet to improve your physical and emotional resilience.

6. **Practice Gratitude:** Taking time each day to acknowledge and appreciate the positive aspects of your life can help shift your focus away from irritations and enhance your overall mood.

7. **Seek Social Support:** Connecting with others can help reduce stress and improve your ability to deal with irritations. This could involve talking about your feelings with a trusted friend or family member, joining a support group, or seeking professional help.

8. **Avoid Overcommitment:** Overcommitting can lead to stress and make you more susceptible to irritability. Try to prioritize and focus on the most important tasks, and don't be afraid to say no when necessary.

Remember, it's normal to be irritated by certain things, and it's not always possible or healthy to suppress your feelings. The goal isn't to be completely unfazed by everything, but rather to develop a more balanced and controlled response to everyday irritations. If you find that irritability is significantly affecting your quality of life, it may be beneficial to seek professional help, such as a psychologist or counselor.

E2 - Laughing Reaction

Learning to laugh at everyday irritants is a way of using humor as a coping strategy. It's an approach that can make life more enjoyable and less stressful. Here are some suggestions:

1. **Reframe Your Perspective:** Try to view the situation from a different, more humorous angle. For example, if you're stuck in traffic, you might imagine a funny story about why everyone's in a rush. This helps you distance yourself from the immediate

annoyance and can lighten your mood.

2. Laugh at Yourself: Learn to laugh at your own overreactions or mistakes. Seeing the humor in our own imperfections can be a powerful antidote to irritation.

3. Surround Yourself with Humor: Listen to comedy podcasts, watch funny videos, or read humorous books. When you surround yourself with things that make you laugh, you're more likely to adopt a humorous perspective in your daily life.

4. Comedic Visualization: Visualize the irritant in a comedic or absurd way. This can turn the annoying situation into a source of amusement.

5. Use Humor Reminders: Find a phrase or a joke that makes you laugh and repeat it to yourself when you feel irritation building.

6. Create Humorous Rituals: You could create a funny "annoyance dance" or song you perform when you're irritated. This light-hearted ritual can help transform the moment of annoyance into one of laughter and joy.

7. Attend Comedy Workshops: These workshops can help you learn techniques to cultivate laughter and take a more humorous approach to life.

Remember, the aim isn't to suppress or ignore your feelings, but to manage them in a healthier, more beneficial way. Some irritations might require more serious attention and problem-solving. However, cultivating a sense of humor can provide a great tool for handling many of the minor annoyances that come our way each day.

E3 - Apology Reaction

Apologizing sincerely and effectively when someone is upset with you is a crucial skill for maintaining healthy relationships. Here are some steps to help you learn how to do this:

1. Acknowledge the Mistake: The first step in making a genuine

apology is acknowledging your mistake or wrongdoing. This requires self-awareness and the ability to take responsibility for your actions.

2. Understand Their Feelings: Try to understand why the other person is upset. This involves empathy - putting yourself in their shoes to understand their feelings. This may involve asking them to explain their feelings if you do not understand why they're upset.

3. Express Sorrow: A genuine apology should express regret or sorrow for what you've done. It's not just about saying the words "I'm sorry", but also about conveying genuine remorse for your actions and their impact on the other person.

4. Apologize Without Conditions: Avoid using "but" in your apology. Saying "I'm sorry, but..." can come across as making excuses for your actions, which can undermine your apology. A genuine apology accepts full responsibility without shifting blame or making excuses.

5. Make Amends: Where possible, try to correct your mistake or make up for it in some way. This could involve making a change in your behavior, fixing a problem you've caused, or making a plan to ensure the same mistake won't happen again.

6. Be Patient: Understand that the other person might need time to process your apology and their feelings. Don't expect instant forgiveness. Be patient and give them the space they need.

7. Practice Active Listening: When apologizing, it's important to listen to the other person's feelings and perspectives without interrupting or getting defensive. Active listening shows that you respect and value their feelings.

8. Practice Apologizing: Like any skill, apologizing effectively can be improved with practice. This might involve role-playing apology scenarios with a friend, or it could involve reflecting on past situations where you needed to apologize and thinking about

how you could have handled them better.

Apologizing genuinely can help repair relationships and build trust, but it requires humility, empathy, and the willingness to admit when you're wrong. Remember, the goal of an apology is not just to get someone to stop being mad at you, but to resolve the issue, learn from the experience, and build a stronger, more understanding relationship.

A pro tip for apology: Sometimes the person who is upset with you is blaming you for doing something that you didn't do. You might be concerned that an apology would implicate you and give them evidence that you are guilty. In these cases, I suggest that you only apologize for the things that are true and avoid validating their delusion. You can say something like: "I am sorry that you are upset with me. I don't want you as an enemy, I would prefer that we stay friends." Be genuine in your delivery, it just might work. However, if the person is hell-bent on staying upset with you, there is little else that you can do other than avoid them or avoid the topic when speaking with them. You may have to accept the fact that they are committed to feeling like your victim. This is always heartbreaking, but there is little else you can do and reconciliation may never be possible. Move on.

E4 - Thank You Reaction

Accepting criticism gracefully, even when it may seem unfounded or unfair, can be challenging. However, it's a valuable skill for personal growth and maintaining positive relationships. Here's how you can genuinely thank someone for their criticism:

1. **Stay Calm:** It's natural to feel defensive when faced with criticism. Before responding, take a moment to breathe and compose yourself. Keeping your emotions in check can help you maintain an open and respectful conversation.
2. **Listen Actively:** Make sure you fully understand the criticism before responding. Even if it seems unfounded, there may be elements that are valuable or provide insight into how others

perceive you. Ask for clarification if needed.

3. **Separate Person from Point:** Remember, the criticism is directed at your action or behavior, not your person. By making this distinction, you can handle criticism more objectively.

4. **Find the Grain of Truth:** Even in unfounded criticism, there might be a kernel of truth or a lesson to be learned. It could reveal a misunderstanding that needs to be cleared up, or highlight an area where you could communicate more effectively.

5. **Express Appreciation:** Once you've processed the criticism, you can express your thanks. Even if you disagree with the criticism, you can still thank the person for their input and their willingness to share their perspective. A simple statement like "Thank you for your feedback. I appreciate your perspective and I'll give it some thought" can suffice.

6. **Respond Appropriately:** If you believe the criticism is indeed unfounded, you can respond respectfully and assertively, but avoid being confrontational. For example, you might say: "Thank you for your feedback. From my perspective, the situation is a bit different, though I appreciate your point of view."

7. **Use it as a Learning Experience:** Every piece of criticism gives you a chance to improve your communication skills and understanding of others. Even if the criticism seems unfounded, the experience of receiving and responding to it can be valuable.

Remember, criticism can be hard to accept, and it's okay to feel upset or confused initially. The key is to manage these feelings effectively and respond in a mature, respectful manner. You can always take some time to process the feedback before responding, especially if the criticism was unexpected or particularly harsh.

In summary, if someone is trying to bother you, brush it off. If someone is trying to joke with you, laugh it off. If someone is hurt by you, apologize. And if someone is trying to criticize you, thank them. It is remarkable how quick you can resolve a conflict with a

more effective response.

NOTE: Sometimes all four A5 - A8 motivations are at play behind someone's aggressive behavior. When this occurs, I advise that you take a reverse order in your more effective response.

- E4 - Thank them
- E3 - Apologize without making excuses or shifting blame
- E2 - Have a good laugh at your own expense
- E1 - Ignore their attempt to bother you and remain unfazed

REVIEW

SQUABBLES Elements In Action

Over the course of this book, we have traversed the SQUABBLES Elements for Conflict Resolution, using Albert Ellis' brilliant A-B-C-D-E framework. We discovered that the most miserable people are those who are easily offended, and if offense was not present, neither would the conflict be. Therefore, I hope I have convinced you that the best thing we can do to help ourselves and others is to cure ourselves of our propensity to be offended. We do this by "giving up the grip" of our demands, removing any distortions that prevent us from reframing the unwanted circumstance from a more preferred point of view. This is what the SQUABBLES Elements was designed to help us do.

My process for helping people never strays far from the SQUABBLES Elements system. I have found it so helpful to serve as a guide as I seek to help relieve people of their suffering. I will list the questions I commonly ask in the order that I ask them to demonstrate how I work through the elements in my interventions.

1. What happened? (A1 - A4)
2. Why do you think they did that? (A5 - A8)
3. How do you feel? (C1 - C4)
4. Are you upset with yourself, others, or life? (B1 - B6)
5. Are you viewing things accurately? (B7 - B12)
6. How could this have been worse? (D1)

7. Why won't this matter in your future? (D2)
8. How could this turn out for your good? (D3)
9. What is a more effective way to respond to them? (E1 - E4)

Going through this process allows us to cover the vast emotional landscape of belief systems and their rigidity, emotional reactions such as anger, sadness, and happiness, and how they are shaped by these belief systems. We've explored various disputing techniques that allow us to navigate negative, neutral, and positive potentials, and ultimately, to reshape our perspectives.

By being specific in our description of the offense, we discover what exactly the person is offended by by asking simply: What happened, and why it occurred. Did someone say something to you (A1), do something to you (A2), say something about you (A3), or do something without you (A4)? Were they trying to bother you (A5), joke with you (A6), were they hurt by you (A7), or simply criticizing you (A8)?

As a quick gauge of the level of offense, we ask them if they are mad (C1), sad (C2), meh (C3), or glad (C4)? Helping them keep the unwanted event in context we use our negative, neutral, positive thinking exercise that asks them: How could this have been worse? Why won't this matter in your future? How could this turn out for your good?

If they struggle to give up the grip of their demands that the unwanted event should not, must not, ought not to happen, we need to dive deeper into their rigid and distorted belief system. We need to find out if they are upset with themselves (B1,2), others (B3,4), or life in general (B5,6). Identifying where the anger is pointed, we can discern that the person feels a violation in the areas of perfection (B1), approval (B2), fairness (B3), helpfulness (B4), comfort (B5), or idealism (B6). After that, we try to discern if the person is viewing things accurately, or if distortions of reality are present (B7 - B12).

This journey has taught us that adversity can, and often does, pave the way for resilience. We've learned that while life may not always be fair or comfortable, our perspective on it can greatly influence our experiences and responses. We've learned that the worst thing that could ever happen to us could actually be the best thing for us. It all depends on how we view it.

Ultimately, this book is about reframing adversity as an opportunity for growth and resilience. It's about using our cognitive abilities to navigate the hardships of life and emerge stronger, more resilient. It's about understanding that we are stronger than we think and that within every adversity lies the potential for growth.

Thank you for joining me on this journey. I hope that the tools and techniques I've shared will help you navigate your own adversities and emerge stronger, more resilient, and with a newfound appreciation for the strength within you. Here's to resilience, to strength, and to the incredible power of perspective.

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Brooks Gibbs is a popular speaker, award-winning resilience educator, and viral video producer who's made significant contributions expanding mental health worldwide.



He started his career as a youth speaker presenting school assemblies in 1999 and received the Youth Speaker of the Year Award by the Office Depot Foundation in 2012. His refreshing approach to bullying prevention helped him become a high-demand resource in the education market.

To date, Brooks has been hired by more than 3,000 events to present his message of resilience to audiences all over North America. Over two million people have seen him speak live, and more than 300 million have watched his teachings online. To expand his reach he established the SQUABBLES Training Institute which certifies educators, counselors, and professional speakers in his unique approach to resolving conflicts. He earned a doctorate degree in social psychology.

He's also an ordained pastor, Bible teacher, and devotional author. He and his family make their home in Safety Harbor, Florida. For contact information, visit www.BrooksGibbs.com.

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